How to Run an Effective Meeting

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Running effective meetings is a skill. It is more than just moving a group through the agenda. The keys are careful planning and attention to group process and follow-up. If you spend a little extra time up front, the group will be comfortable, everyone will feel they've been heard, decisions will be made, and people will leave with a sense of accomplishment and time well spent.

> *We all want to avoid those meetings that seem to last forever, where few decisions are made. Meetings don't have to be painful. With a little planning, your group will appreciate the process and be committed to the decisions that come out of it.*

A Plan the agenda and goal

Why are you meeting? Write out a clear goal and what you would like to end up with at the end of the meeting. Involve other staff in this process. This will help you decide who should be there and how much time you will need.

Gather the information and research. Decisions can't be made without all the important information.

Draft an agenda. Use it both as a road map and a time planner. Prioritize the topics making sure that high priority items are not last. Estimate the number of minutes each item will take and assign a starting time for each.

An agenda should always start with a welcome and time for introductions. Allow time at the end to review what you've accomplished, to talk about next steps and to thank people for their time.

B Arrange the logistics.

Find a comfortable and convenient meeting space. Follow any requirements your agency has on handicapped accessible facilities. Arrange in advance for audio-visual equipment or materials such as markers and flip charts. Arrive early to set up and make sure everything is ready to use. Greet people as they arrive.

Offer beverages and snacks.

Provide name tags or table tents so people recognize and get to know each other.

Make sure there are enough comfortable chairs for everyone. Seating arrangements can influence the flow a meeting. Set up the chairs before the meeting starts. Decide whether to put them around a table, in a circle, or semicircle. Participants will feel more involved and acknowledged if they sit facing each other, rather than in rows.

Send out an announcement of the date and time of the meeting with plenty of advance notice. Follow up with a telephone reminder several days before the meeting. This will improve attendance. People also appreciate receiving both a copy of the agenda and directions prior to the meeting.

C Keep the discussion on track.

Your job as facilitator will take all of your attention, so get another person to take minutes and help with other tasks. Don’t try to be both a facilitator and a participant.

- **Welcome and introduce participants** and guests. You may want to plan a brief “ice breaker” where each person speaks and gets to know others.
- **State the purpose**, get agreement on the agenda and ground rules.
- **Honor time limits, but be sensitive to the need for discussion**. Allow the group to talk things through. If they want more time to discuss an issue, adjust the agenda. Recognize when there is consensus and move on. Be gentle but firm with people who speak too long or get off the subject.
- **Summarize** conclusions or decisions as each agenda item is completed.

D Promote participation and group discussion.

Plan a question or activity early in the meeting where each person is asked to contribute in turn. This establishes your intention to encourage participation and gets everyone over any initial hesitancy to speak up.

- Ask open-ended questions and sincerely acknowledge each comment. Avoid value judgments.
- If one person is dominating, simply say, “Ok, let’s hear from someone else.”
- Listen carefully to each person. Make sure you understand what the speaker is saying. If you are unsure, try restating it or ask the person to clarify.
- Use appropriate humor. It can release tension and get people talking.

Ⓔ Follow Up.

Your work doesn’t end when the meeting ends. Communicate the group’s decisions to those who are affected so that decisions can be put into action. Make sure copies of the minutes are distributed. Remind people what they agreed to do.

Meeting and Facilitation Models

● *Technology of Participation, developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA):*

Discussion Method
Takes the group through stages of learning: objective, reflective, interpretive and decisional. Use this method to reflect on experiences or events, evaluate and discuss tough issues, collect ideas and give out information.

Workshop Method
Generates team consensus, creativity and responsibility. Use to brainstorm, organize and name ideas, activities and priorities. Works for consensus building in a diverse group.

Action Planning
Effective for launching a new project or activity. Use to clarify direction, align resources, designate leadership roles and responsibilities, and build team trust and support.

● *Critical thinking and goal setting from the Community Development Society:*

Force Field Analysis
Builds momentum for reaching a goal. Helps avoid working on unattainable goals. Use to identify forces that maintain the status quo, push toward change, and resist change. Works best with a group of 20 or less.

Resources

Organizations:
The Institute of Cultural Affairs: 1504 25th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98122;
Phone: 206-323-2100; E-mail: icaseattle@igc.apc.org.

Books and Articles:

Hustedde, M. ***Force Field Analysis: Incorporating Critical Thinking in Goal Setting.*** Community Development Society. 1123 N. Water St., Milwaukee WI 53202; Phone: 414-276-7106.

Vella, J. ***Learning to Listen Learning to Teach***. Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers. San Francisco. 1994.
Jossey-Bass web address: http://www.jossey-bass.com/WileyCDA/

How-To Guides on Community Health Promotion. Guide 15: Running Effective Meeting in Health Promotion Organizations. Stanford Center for Research in Disease Prevention: Health Promotion Resource Center. Palo Alto. 1993.
Phone: 650-723-0003

Weiser, A. "It's Easier Than You Think: Some Hints for Facilitating Meetings." ***In Context***, Spring, 1985, p.26.

Fox, W.M. ***Effective Group Problem Solving: How to Broaden Participation, Improve Decision Making, and Increase Commitment to Action***. Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers. San Francisco. 1987.
Jossey-Bass web address: http://www.jossy-bass.com

On the Internet:
University of Kansas Community Tool Box: Part E, Chapter 10a, Section 2
Conducting Effective Meetings.
Web address: http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/ctb/tools.html

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